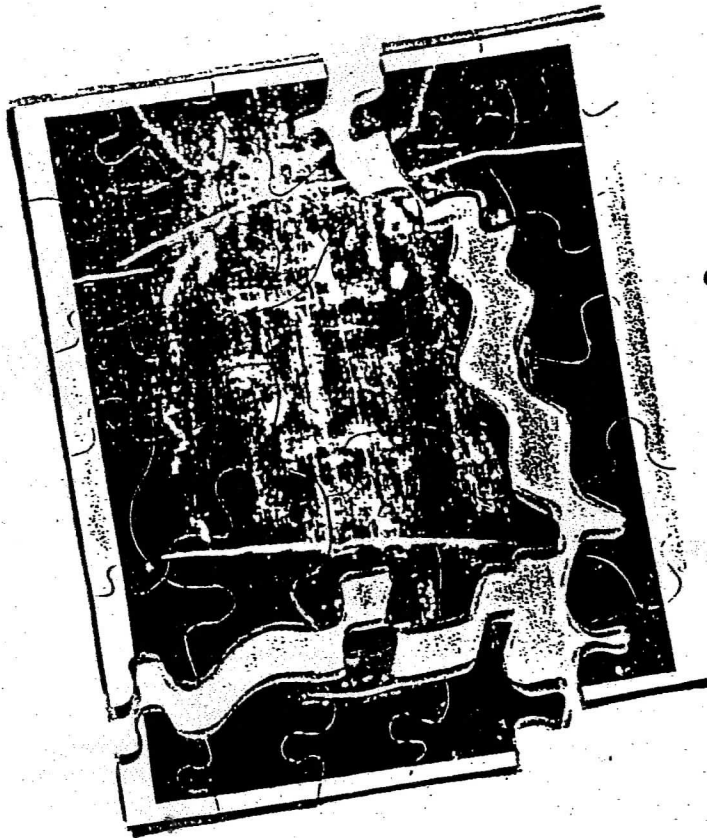


The American

RATIONALIST

THE ALTERNATIVE TO RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION

\$1.00
July-August, 1989



Postmortem on the "Shroud" of Turin

BY JOE NICKELL

Pieces of the "shroud" puzzle are now coming together: radiocarbon tests have established a medieval date for the cloth, and an artistic rubbing technique can reproduce "negative" image properties.

A Fresh Look at the Priestly Account of Creation

BY A. J. MATTILL, JR., Ph.D.

What Makes the Ugly Cosmos Tick?

BY DAVID C. MORROW

Let Us Vouch to Fight the Voucher System

BY BERNARD KATZ

Ernest Nagel: Mr. Sovereign Reason Himself

BY BERNARD KATZ

What Makes the Ugly Cosmos Tick?

BY DAVID C. MORROW

The cosmology of Fundamentalist Christians, which they claim is changeless, is unaesthetic and incomparably cruel. Beyond the absolute fact that it is wrong, these three properties which provide its appeal make Fundamentalism, not science and technology a major source of social alienation and ecological disaster.

The first, intended to show its congruence with an unchanging reality and evoke the security of childhood, is the most obvious. Fundamentalists live in a narrow conceptual universe most of whose historical development they deny.

Whoever considers the Bible literally true, for example, should at least believe Earth central to a Ptolemaic universe, if not flat. Modern means of travel and centuries of the practical use of heliocentric theory simply do not allow individuals to maintain such beliefs. Yet Fundamentalists have continued despite this to insist that we remain in the world not even of Martin Luther but of Jesus, if not of Moses or Abraham.

The second property, the sheer *ugliness* of a pastiche cosmology whose astronomy is space age and whose geology and bioscience are neolithic is the outcome of the first.

Fundamentalists insist the universe has existed only six thousand, or to stretch it, maybe ten thousand years, ostensibly because Biblical creation stories seem to give it this span. Christians are no longer able to live in the shoebox cosmos of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia and those who refuse even to rationalize the meaning of a Genesis "day" as aeons insist in effect that the world lacks temporal depth as well as intrinsic structural coherence.

The proofs of geology and biology are more subtle but, paradoxically, more immediately experienced than astronomy's. For reasons noted above, religious conservatives can learn to fly airplanes or even spacecraft with no threat to their belief systems; to become biologists, however, they must study complex matters basic to several sciences which are coherent only under evolutionary theory. But since it is now used in medicine, in stock breeding, even in children's cartoons and the study of clothing fashions, those who refuse to accept evolution either have to engage in ever more convoluted rationalizations to fit the world to their procrustean schemes or deny any need to try. Judging from the vociferousness with which Fundamentalists attack books and movies that touch upon these alternatives, both of them occasion considerable mental stress.

This is partly because bodily continuities between humans and other animals are daily obvious even to people who never see monkeys. Why else than by kinship must we all have to breathe, drink, eat, excrete, and feel the same needs and desires? How else could we empathize with pets? Why else would the

societies of cattle and wolves line themselves out upon the same hierarchical principles as those of humans, enabling their domestication?

These universal animalisms are the "facts of life," experienced necessarily even by Jesus as man were Christianity true, and necessarily anyway if he existed, that Fundamentalists seek so strenuously to evade. Because this inescapable intimacy with crude reality proves humans part of nature and compels Fundamentalists by the tenets of their own faith to ponder their Savior in an outhouse, they go to awkward lengths to evade it.

To explain geological evidence, the continuity of molecular structures throughout living matter, the evolution of new pathogens in response to antibiotics, the correspondence of DNA studies to evolutionary relationships deduced from fossils and phenotype resemblances, Fundamentalists use the old principle of alienation.

God, it seems, has devised genetic relationships, put fossils in strata, and created radioactive elements in quantities and with half lives that appear to show evolution during of millions of years for the purpose of further tormenting His beloved creation with tests of doubt. Or, despite God's omnipotence, Satan created the tempting and logically coherent illusion revealed by science to deceive people into relinquishing their souls.

The Fundamentalist world lacks depth. It is a shallow, almost instantaneous event at once childishly simple and artificially complicated. In this cosmos life, humans especially, did not arise through the actions of natural law out of the very elements and forces of nature. Rather we are strangers contrived and plunked briefly down in an alien realm for an external Being's inexplicable purposes.

The Fundamentalists' universe is like an amusement park. Heeding their explanations is like being adult yet required to take Disneyland's deliberate illusions for reality even after staying after hours to look behind their appearances. The jungle's fierce hippopotami are plastic shells on metal frames with gears and fuse boxes making them rise and bellow in dyed water. For all his compassionate words, Abraham Lincoln is a rubber membrane moving on a steel armature, guided by wires and programmed by a computer. The spacecraft's control module is a hollow mockup, its view a studio made video, vibrated by hydraulic jacks. Mickey doffs his mask to light up a stogie and guzzle a quick couple of brewskies before playing grabass with Snow White.

This universe is a sham, a trick hiding with seeming inefficiency the facts of life and Christian motives that believers are required to accept without question. It is officially alright to gaze in wonder at the facade, but never at the profound beauty of the natural or the profound seediness of the social truth.

And that apparent world is not just patently false, but more horrible even than the social darwinism it underlies. Everybody save a certain elect is doomed to Hell. Only God knows for sure who these are and why they are chosen, meaning that from our perspective our carefully considered, often agonizing moral choices have only a coincidental relationship to the eternal fates which Fundamentalists also tell us they determine for us.

The majority who go to Hell, including through no possible fault of their own Chinese who lived before Christ and pre-conquest Australians, however decent and refined they may have been, however much good they may have done even in terms of Christian teaching, will burn forever. There is not any hope that the damned can save their descendants through their struggles, as in evolutionary theory. This immutable command of God, of course, is the ideological basis for much of Western racism and imperialism.

It is also immeasurably more cruel than natural selection, which is *innocent*. However much suffering for however many the latter postulates, that suffering has seldom been intentional. It is the result of chance or the blind action of natural forces or of necessities like hunger; only with the rise out of these forces of reflective consciousness capable of self-control does it become cruel.

Fundamentalists teach that God has intentionally designed a universe that will culminate in everlasting torture for creatures unable even to comprehend why. Because their fate is *intentional*, consciously, deliberately inflicted by an all powerful Being on its helpless subjects, Fundamentalism is far more cruel than even the most sanguinary scientific theory.

It is basic to all Christian faiths that humanity is separate from the world, alone among soulless creatures and people who are nearly all damned. Christianity arose before modern science, meaning that religiously inspired alienation existed centuries before recent technological advances. It thus cannot be the conceptual and material changes brought about by science, which prove that we grew out of the very substance of nature, that leave modern persons feeling alone and meaningless in a hostile, incomprehensible world, but outdated ways of thought persisting partly through habit but largely through the deliberate efforts of religious leaders.

The world science discovers, out of which arose all life, us included, is orderly and accessible to reason; science admits mistakes and corrects itself. Science works: for countless millennia, despite prayer and piety, polio maimed and killed millions until scientists discovered a preventive vaccine. People know this, just as they know that science will, whether or not in the time of anyone now living, cure cancer.

Science is directly beneficial to life. Efforts to save endangered species and clean up the environment are an example. They do not spring from a Christianity that sees no need to save mere automata over which God has given us dominion and which anyway will in fulfillment of God's plan to torment most of His creatures be swept from existence on the always imminent Judgment Day. Today's ecological awareness results from experience, scientific studies of human impact on the world, and from the philosophical concepts of

The Fundamentalist cosmos, in which sensitive and intelligent but almost certainly doomed humans must raise up their voices in praise of a cruel Creator, is deliberately incomprehensible. Compared to what science has accomplished (the creation of new comforts, elimination of one disease after another, opening up other worlds to us) it is sorry, negative stuff and it fails to deliver. Fundamentalist leaders have turned this problem into a unique solution to the difficulty it causes them. Herein lies their other purpose in denying evolution.

The modern strategy of Fundamentalism is to create mental stress through cognitive dissonance among religious tenets—by simultaneously teaching and shunning Jesus' humanity—and between these and the conceptual framework within which people now must necessarily operate.

The sheer ugliness of its cosmology helps Fundamentalist Christianity to perpetuate religion's basis in alienation and anxiety. Because science works and people know it, Fundamentalism has in it a permanent enemy and scapegoat; since believers cannot question religious tenets, they are encouraged to blame problems on the reason and technology that sustains our prosperity and gives endless opportunities for improvement.

Preachers are fully aware of the ugliness and impossibility of the cosmology they maintain and so insist it, along with their own ethical hypocracies, be accepted rather than revised. The key element in their strategy is that under the stress of operating in two divergent conceptual frames which they are forbidden to reconcile, believers will in despair simply accept rather than even think about the doctrines that cause modern society so much instability.

In *The Faith of a Heretic* Walter Kaufmann who recently died in Princeton at age 59, reports this amazing case of theological acrobatics done by Jesuit John Walsh in *This is Catholicism*. Walsh repeats the statement that "membership in the Catholic Church is the solitary means of salvation." This is hard for adherents of other religions to take but Walsh prepares the reader quickly for an amazing Jesuitical switch. He reasons that we must assume that a religious person will do everything he judges necessary to attain salvation. Thus he has, objectively speaking, done the equivalent of belonging to the Catholic Church. The two resolves merge, and although the Non-Catholic is unaware of it, that does not alter the objective fact that his sincere desire for salvation coincides with a desire to belong to the Catholic Church. This unconscious longing God recognizes as a substitute for belonging as the equivalent of real membership.

Sectarian fights have broken out between Egypt's Muslim majority and the Coptic Orthodox Church, an ancient Christian community which claims to be the true Egyptians, Copt being the Greek word for Egypt. They constitute less than 10% of the population and are the largest Christian group in any Middle Eastern country.

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May-June, 1990

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The non-biblical research of the past 200 years has failed
to find the historical Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth: Myth or Reality?

By Ronald Charles Tanquay

Science is blamed for our alienation?

This Actually is Society's Fault

By David C. Morrow

The most quoted biblical verse

John 3:16 Examined

By C. Lee Hubbell

Is death-control coming of age?

Euthanasia: The Right to Die With Dignity

By Bernard Katz

Religious intolerance and injustice produced many protestors
who inspired early freethinkers

Christianity Under Attack

Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment

By Walter Hoops

We begin our 35th year
presenting the Rationalist Viewpoint

This Actually is Society's Fault

By David C. Morrow

It is common to blame science for alienation and lack of community feeling. One reason is the Judeo-Christian teaching that humanity and God are utterly separate and that people must through guilt and fear seek to become one with him, or atone for guilt toward him, or learn to live by his rules. Upon this fostered belief churches and cults build their claims to help people accomplish these aims. The organizations through which they provide this "help" use the scientific concepts current at the time of their establishment as inevitably as they must assume alienation is an intrinsic property of existence.

When knowledge and especially its practical application invalidate earlier ideas of how things work, religious organizations are discredited and leave people with their alienation. Science and not religion is blamed for this pain and disorientation and doubt of values because these are still seldom seen as consequences of ignorance and conditioning and because it is change in the understanding of nature that invalidated defense mechanisms.

However, alienation exists in Non-Western and non-scientific cultures and was present in early Western societies. The science of Classical Europe, a well documented example of the latter, attained a level not surpassed or even reached until the 1800s, and there is abundant evidence of Greek and Roman alienation. To get an idea of the latter one can consult Peter Brown's *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Tarn's *Hellenistic Civilization*, or Robert L. Wilkin's *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*.

Widespread alienation and loss of faith followed Alexander's conquests. Morals are said to have declined, military thugs took over governments and were often the only upholders of civil order. A vast growth of clubs and guilds, replacing shattered local and family affiliations, began in Hellenistic times along with the spread of magical practices, cults, mystery religions, and detached philosophies such as Stoicism.

Finally, people turned for solace to religion in the form of dogmatic Christianity. We know the tragic results to learning and ethics. It is also clear that despite its great achievements science cannot have brought about the motivating disorder and distress.

There are excellent studies of Classical science, a couple of the most accessible being *Engineering in the Ancient World* by J. G. Landels and Henry Hodges' *Technology in the Ancient World*. Ancient science, theoretical and applied, was limited either to narrow academic cliques or craft guilds that to maintain monopolies kept their knowledge secret; both groups often functioned like secret orders, mixing genuine science with now obviously incompatible beliefs. Indeed, they most often applied it to supporting, not opposing superstition.

Many Hellenistic and Roman temples had automatic doors and statues that stood and sang or issued oracular pronouncements; coin operated vending machines issued holy water; mirrors focussed sunlight to spark sacred fires; soothsayers peered through arrangements of glass panes and mirrors into scenes enacted in adjacent buildings and convinced clients they were watching the gods. The famous Antikythera machine, an example of common if expensive mechanical calculators, seems to have been used to eliminate the tedious mathematics involved in casting horoscopes.

Technology was put to such practical uses as bilge pumps or the diversion of water to run mills and keep cities liveable, and the Romans understood the principle of mass production and standardized parts. However, the Classical economy was based largely on slavery, meaning that such innovations as the steam engines that Greek scientists invented were seen as an economic threat by moneyed interests.

Thus Classical science could not have had the widespread effects on society its descendant has, not only because it was used like religion to allay anxiety by supporting the structures that generated fear, but also because it was never as pervasive or highly developed. The alienation often credited to it is what prematurely halted its growth by enabling Christianity to consolidate its own psychosocial organization.

Greeks and Romans never went to the Moon, they never transplanted hearts; they only poorly understood the application of some antibiotic substances; their chemistry produced dyes and poisons but never nylon or propane; they could but speculate about evolution, genetics, the sea floor, the Antarctic. Ancient scientists wrought no social revolution.

Besides the authoritative cultivation of anxiety, there is a factor common to the Classical and Modern West that works against happiness. It is dangerous to draw parallels between our and their world, first because of the very differences science has made. A second reason is the semi-mystical and totally false popular belief in "historical cycles." Pseudo-historians like Spengler and Toynbee, who use the career of Ancient European civilization as a general paradigm, discount the power of reason and learning and insist that history is an inevitable succession of cycles through which humans move like the senseless molecules in a whirlpool. In making my comparison, I do not want to be taken for an advocate of this nonsense; I am trying to suggest an alternative.

Both the classical and modern West developed large governments. Local, more personal affiliations and distinctions are erased as people depend on distant rulers, on impersonal and proliferating bureaucracies, on vast distribution networks controlled by increasingly smaller numbers of persons, on employment in multiethnic armies.

of peoples, their laws must be broad and general. Custom and local identities level off, dialects and languages disappear along with more personal sources of identity. People no longer form deep attachments to others because these cannot be maintained over laws that, unable to place individuals or families above the superstate, reduce them to abstract, interchangeable ciphers.

To put this latter in basic terms, the questions arise: Why marry if divorce is possible on mere whim? Why rear children who cannot be expected to support you in old age? Why do anything creative if your effect on your own life is trivial and for all the lack of community one person shares exactly the same unimportant identity as fifty million others? When there is no point in investing strong emotion in families or local pride that are overwhelmed by distant, impersonal authorities, coolness, aloofness, and distance, a falling apart of social interactions into formality or amorality or both, preserve a sense of self. Alienation is actually a viable response that maintains personal identity.

Yet it also brings on what has been termed "existential dread" because it cannot fulfill all the innate needs of social creatures. For community people turn

to create a genuine society. These include fatalism before historical cycles or, if subjects feel deeply alienated, officially disapproved beliefs. Most often, like religion, they lead safely away from considering the governmental sources of troubles. These were all functions of the early church.

It is not science but the growth of large governments, of standardization and the loss of linguistic and cultural identity, interference in the family and small communities by big government that caused alienation in classical and modern society.

The solution to anxiety lies neither in religion—although, alas, it will under these conditions grow and can only be influenced, not halted—nor anarchy. Rather it is the orderly breaking down of large organizations, including empires and continental nations, into their component parts and the use of science to make individuals increasingly healthy, educated, and *independent* so that their associations may be from choice and not despair. This, in its turn, will bring about a lessening of superstition among people who become happy and secure without it. Far from dooming us to alienation and misery, science is actually our only salvation from them, even as religion is one of their primary sources.

Walter Hoops

AT RANDOM

Freethought News from the Realm
of Literature and the Arts

Christian Science is in trouble. Not only is this faith-healing invention of a daft woman loosing membership. Its publications have been highly subsidized to the tune of 200 million dollars since 1961. Now the efforts to modernize by developing a radio service and a worldwide shortwave operation has only dug a larger hole. The editor and assistant managing editor of the Monitor resigned when the staff was cut by one-fourth.

Justin Kaplan, the biographer of Mark Twain, Walt Whitman and Lincoln Steffens is the new editor of the 10th edition of Bartlett's Quotations to be ready in the early 1990s. He says it will contain quite a few sayings from the "new guys" and have even a few four-letter words from authors like Hemingway and Jong.

One of the more entertaining anti-clerical novels of last year was *Wheat That Springeth Green* by J. F. Powers (20.95 ppd). It deals with a Father Hackett who as a track-star and sexual athlete had a vision to become a saint. Now, years later, he is a disappointed priest who compares his parish with a cattle-car in winter, appreciating the warmth of their dear dumb friends. He becomes a lush, self-absorbed, bogged down in trivial church affairs.

George Orwell, author of *Animal Farm*, *Good-bye to Catalonia* and other works said about Charles Dickens that he succeeded in attacking everybody and antagonizing nobody. Viewers of three new films based on Dickens characters can testify to the truth of this observation. All of them are worthwhile seeing: *Oliver & Company*, *Little Dorrit* and *Scrooged*.

"Nunsense," a wacky comedy which played in San Francisco with Phyllis Diller, is worthwhile seeing on its tour around the country. The Mother Superior is trying to raise money because 52 of her flock have been inadvertently poisoned by the convent cook named "Julia Child of God." The nuns have only money to bury 48 of them. One can't keep the corpses of the others in the freezer forever.

According to the *Journal Du Dimanche*, a fundamentalist Roman Catholic organization may be responsible for the fire-bombing of a movie-house in Paris where *The Last Temptation of Christ* was shown.

In a moment of a true self-estimate Billy Graham said recently in an interview that he did not assert leadership over the "Evangelists" because he lacked the intellectual qualifications.

A history of the Hare Krishnas (full title International Society for Krishna Consciousness) under the title *Monkey on a Stick* (\$21.95 ppd) by John Hubner and Lindsey Grusom is now available. Started as a store-front attraction in Manhattan's East Village during the 60's it became in 10 years—with the help of the Beatles—a world movement collecting millions of dollars through thousands of followers whose shaved heads and saffron robes became a familiar sight on street corners and near airports. 1977 brought the death of founder A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada and soon a split among his followers. One of them was Charles St. Denis who was killed for withholding money from Keith Ham known as Kirtanananda, the "heavy" in this book. Ham had been a former doctoral student of religious history at Columbia University and had founded New Vrindaban. Two members are now serving prison terms in West Virginia.

Prices mentioned in parenthesis indicate that these books are available through our Book Service—AR.

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Correcting a few Myths

The Misconceptions of Evolution

By Ransom R. Traxler

There is an appalling ignorance of Buddha's
Contribution to Secular Humanist Thought

Buddha—The Secular Humanist

By Jyoti Shankar

Was the design of humankind a monstrous error?

The Omnipotent Designer

By Daniel K. Speer

"Magic" is one way to make a living

Here's How They Do It

By David C. Morrow

Eight reasons why atheism appears to be a failure

Axe Eupraxophy!

By Jane Conrad

A little fun with an imaginary conference

A Heated Discussion between Satan and an Atheist

By Bernard Katz

**We Begin our 36th Year
Presenting the Rationalist Viewpoint**

religion exists. Time has proven the truth of my thesis expressed in *Pillars of Religion: Ignorance, Indoctrination, Inadequacy* written long ago. With the advent of cable television and satellites, remote cultures are gaining access to information that was not available in years past. But indoctrination into beliefs of the past does continue and people fail to examine the contradictions between their beliefs and the reality of what takes place. Emotional needs have always been met by religion and it continues to function in that manner.

7. Atheists have failed to get corporate funds to support their efforts. With money, you can get the television time necessary to enlighten the public.

with major industries of today. Perhaps that is where we should seek the money. Industry will need enlightened individuals and Atheists show that they have the ability to use critical thinking, the basic tool of the future.

8. Atheist and Humanist literature must be written in language ordinary churchgoers can comprehend. Too many articles are beyond the comprehension of elementary school students. Our target should be ordinary people, not upper level college graduates.

These are the problems. Can we develop a program to solve them? DREAM ON, JANE!

Here's How They Do It

By David C. Morrow

An explanation of some problems in religion and magic occurred to me a decade or so ago when an ex-sister-in-law told me about an exorcism involving one of her older relatives.

During the 1940s or so this person, her great-aunt if memory serves, began to be troubled by certain dreams. After suffering these dreams and disturbing thoughts and seeing other supernatural signs about her, the aunt decided to consult a *curandero* of high repute who lived in Matamoros, in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, some 120 miles south of Corpus Christi, Texas where she lived. She and her sister, with another relative, drove to Matamoros to consult him.

This "curer" interviewed the ladies and performed whatever particular rites were called for by his brand of magic and then, perhaps on the basis of the clever psychotherapy these concealed, announced that the dreams were caused by the aunt's deceased grandmother. The old lady had been buried with a piece of jewelry she wanted the aunt to have. The *curandero* explained that on a certain night a week or so thence, presumably when the stars were right, the sister must return to Matamoros for a seance with him and the aunt must go to their grandmother's grave in Corpus Christi.

On the appointed night, again I imagine after the expected ceremonies, one lady met with the witch doctor in Matamoros while the other, doubtless with much fear of ghosts, not to say the cops, went to the cemetery. At midnight, while of of them sat before the Mexican in his house watching him enter into a trance, the other saw him step from behind a tree some 120 miles away, hand her a piece of jewelry, and vanish again into the shrubbery.

Afterward, the aunt was no longer troubled by her dreams. How much she paid for the seances (and the jewelry) I do not know.

Hispanic culture is not without other instances of "bilocation." For example, a certain 16th century female saint whose name I cannot recall was safely immured in a convent outside Madrid, Spain while

conducting missionary activities throughout what is now the United States' Southwest. Perhaps it was out of respect for her family and traditions that Francis, who was thirty and had a college degree, offered no further explanation for her great-aunt's experience.

I recalled some anthropological studies I had read, and then an instance in high school when I walked up to a person I thought was in one of my classes and began talking about some matter only to find him completely puzzled. Actually, it was his twin who was in my class. Many peoples consider the birth of twins magical or even frightening. Some Amazonians logically believe it proof a wife has committed adultery, but early Europeans seem to have credited twins with extraordinary powers—Romulus and Remus, for example.

The *curandero* must have been twins, and it must have taken a week to find an appropriate piece of jewelry, send one twin to Corpus Christi, and then set up the incident by long distance. That this psychodrama actually alleviated the aunt's problem, is the real wonder.

Such things can have even more widespread effects even then amusing pranks or magic acts and their accumulation in folklore. Bilocation is the least important of these. A deceased person's twin might make him appear resurrected to those not aware of his dual nature, something that may have happened many times in ages past.

One pernicious consequence of belief in the paranormal is economic. Millions of dollars are spent on casting horoscopes, purchasing food fads and pursuing dubious diets and vitamin regimens. Parapsychology also exists at the expense of serious science: Gresham's Law applies to paranormal beliefs, so that bad science, such as creationism or astral projection, drives out good science—or at least muddles it in the public mind.

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September–October, 1991

The “Religious Instinct”

By David C. Morrow

Nuts in the News

By J. D. Bell

Gullibility—The Gordian Knot

By Marge Mignacca

But They’ve Got the Wrong Revelation!

By Bernard Katz

Eupraxophy and Civilization

By Albert E. Johnson



The "Religious Instinct"

By David C. Morrow

Recently there has been much talk about an innate religious drive and a convergence of science with religion. Supernatural ideas (though not organized religion) occur in every society, leading even prominent sociobiologists to hypothesize a universal, specifically religious drive as innate as the needs for water, food, companionship. Beginning perhaps with the discovery that yogis can control some psychosomatic processes, science has occasionally verified particular religious elements. Some physicists have formulated recent findings in terms resembling the paradoxical utterances of mystics. The popular conclusion is that if people have evolved to be religious and if the hardest of the hard sciences has come to resemble religion, then religion is proven true. However, it is possible to explain both developments without validating religion either as a biological need or an account of objective reality.

Intelligence developed not to fulfill a cosmic scheme, but because its possessors can very effectively satisfy their needs for food, sex, social interaction. These actual drives require goal directed behavior, which structures intelligence. This is one of few constraints on human intelligence, but an important one; Abraham Maslow discovered that in contrast to neurotics, the psychologically healthy persons he studied had a goal or purpose in life. This purpose could be down to earth—the intention to be a good homemaker, for example—as well as abstract, or it could be unrealistic, even preposterous.

The ability to organize data on the basis of its own properties must be "wired" into the brain, but does not directly determine behavior. In the absence of specific, innate behavior sequences, goal directedness serves as an organizing principle, but one that is, like pure instinct, a biological property not necessarily found outside living matter.

Another factor of intelligence is the creation of models of situations from which to choose a course of action toward goals. This involves memory, the abilities to mix in various combinations subjective feelings with input from different senses and to fantasize, and the capacity to test the results against reality or logic—or to rationalize them. Since the world is complex and changeable, and since humans lack strong instincts and even sense organs to detect most of the world's properties, intelligence must be able to entertain and try to reconcile contradictory models, and for the same reasons, learn to test them.

It is therefore vital to *learn* to distinguish between the statements, "The lioness killed the gazelle because she was hungry," and, "The rock rolled downhill because it wanted to." Paradoxically, this power allows

wholly false models to persist as long as they do not obviously endanger societies; the belief that the Earth is central and seasons caused by the sun's movements never prevented the effective practice of agriculture and herding.

The example of this cosmology and its correction shows how greatly human intelligence exceeds the demands of our immediately experienced environment. The cause is not supernatural. Reviewing animal lineages that show increasing body size over millions of years, paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson suggested that these creatures (like the

Competition for mates and social status among creatures having a critical level of intelligence must have comparable results. The smarter an individual, the more successfully he or she can psych out, deceive, out maneuver, or work more effectively than competitors. Intelligence becomes a self-stimulating property and as this process grows more complex it gives rise to the dialectic of organizations and ideas that is history.

descendants of many of them) engaged in courtship struggles in which bulk conferred an advantage. The repated success of slightly larger combatants caused the long term increase in size. In other cases courtship gave rise to the Irish elk's huge antlers and the peacock's feathers.

Primitive cosmologies seem to combine realistic and fantastic ideas with subjective matter, which suggests that civilization develops as methods of testing theories improve. Social structure is so vital that much effort goes into it, and the religious model of cosmology proved highly effective in tightening organization and control by combining these with a sense of purpose. This explains its success and its antagonism to speculation.

Some advanced peoples like the Sumerians and Mayans treated natural forces as part of their societies' ruling classes, classifying, say, a flood that devastates a town in the same category as a chieftain's execution of an offender. Their efforts to interact with personified wind or rivers gave rise to a class of technicians who claimed and for millenia actually believed that they dealt with these deities, in so doing, they refined the arts of government.

Even the earliest records show that most theocracies are aggressive and ethnocentric, using warfare, murder, torture, and superstition to enslave and convert their neighbors. Other societies would devise religious institutions out of self-defense or a desire for the power and wealth they brought. Thus organized religion and religious motifs and practices are widespread not because they are inborn but because of

millenia of imperialism, commerce, migration, and cultural diffusion.

Maslow's examples, and now that Western religions lack police power, people chosen at random show that nearly any purpose can have the same function as religion. Religion may or may not figure in the lives of a matador or a secretary, but we can be sure that their occupations involve much more of their time and personalities. While belief might (as in Minoan Crete) motivate one to enter either field, the reasons today are more likely economic or uniquely personal.

A Communist in the United States of 1955 would have been an ideological atheist, but his or her life was made as meaningful and fulfilling as that of the Baptist preacher next door by the aim of destroying capitalism on its home turf. A scientist may spend a lifetime detailing the ecology and evolution of some mollusk while the spy's neighbor spends the same span "saving souls," and if that research is reported in terms similar to the latter's sermons the reason has less to do with the material than with its reporter.

Logically, if serving the same psychological use as science-validated religion, the reverse could be equally asserted and applied as well to Marxism. Rather than an instinctive behavior, religion is a social and psychological tool that was invented, developed and refined, and has at last been found not only inadequate, but dangerous.

Animals enlarged by sexual selection are preadapted to intimidate predators and retain body heat; human intelligence, honed by social competition, enables us to master the newtonian range in which we operate and to extrapolate somewhat beyond it. Just as mammoths could not prevent epidemics or armour themselves against spears, so must we have limits. The weaknesses intelligence evolved to overcome are obvious: while no law of physics would have kept us from being as strong as gorillas or as swift as cheetahs, we lack and do not need the necessary genes.

Some others are accessible. X-rays have always shot through us undetected, perhaps because their effects are weak and random with respect to species survival, and we never knew it until recently. Now we can use x-rays to enhance our survival, but we can do it because we are preadapted to do it. X-rays are a segment of the energy continuum that includes visible light and despite differences they behave in the same manner. Because we are "wired" to use light, we are able to understand x-rays and arrange apparatus so as to render visible the shadows they cast. Even so, we have reached the point at which we cannot speak with certainty. Not only could there be qualities we have no neurological equipment even to deduce, but light itself appears to be both particles and waves—meaning that behind these detectable properties lies one we cannot grasp.

Another example of what could be called a structural flaw in the mind is the goal directedness of thinking. The philosophical problems that have always puzzled us may also define the boundaries of our reasoning capacities. Optical illusions show the limits of our visual program when they enable us to represent solid figures on flat surfaces and create baffling art a la Escher. Since thinking is likewise a function of finite brain structure, such perennial problems as

that of predeterminism and free will, of the nature of consciousness and time, and whether the universe has a beginning and a purpose may, like light's simultaneously discrete and continuous appearance, be "rational illusions." That is, they could be our experience of neurological loops, or the result of our inability to understand such very subtle phenomena, or they may be gibberish—psychic static generated where we have no useable neurons—upon which we project our concerns as we do upon the psychologist's ink blots.

Pavlov used dogs' inability to see shape and detail as acutely as humans to design an experimental model of neurosis. His subjects were punished when shown a circle and rewarded when shown a triangle. With these connections established, Pavlov would replace the triangle with a square, a pentagon, and so on. As the polygons approached circularity the dogs became apprehensive and long before seeing an actual circle they whimpered, howled, tried to escape their restraints, and lost control of body functions.

Having reached the limits of their perceptual and reasoning abilities—while Pavlov could easily distinguish the figures and of course fully understood the situation he had himself created—the dogs became confused and afraid. In the same way the seeming convergence of science and religion may reveal those limits to human abilities (or those of specific scientists) that we cannot otherwise detect.

Religious thinking has to follow the same innate patterns as scientific. However, it is based on incorrect assumptions and controlled not by objective reality, but only by the limits of an individual's ability and culture, and by authorities. Even these can be dealt with by rationalization, meaning that theology is largely fantasy. Before the dawn of history theology had by fantasizing on its erroneous premises and on unanswerable puzzles pushed sheer thought to the boundaries of human ability. This explains such elegant nonsense as transubstantiation, the Trinity, the "Ineffable Ground of Being," and tales of chimeras and miracles, of inevitable and predestined fates befalling persons as the outcome of free choice, of gods and even Absolutely Supreme Beings motivated by petty jealousy; thus the use of paradox and riddle to explain religious insight, or assertions of having experienced the inexplicable.

Maybe with science we have pushed our reach beyond our mental grasp. We are less likely to know everything than to have reached a level too subtle and complex for us to understand and before which we stand as baffled as Pavlov's hounds before a dodecagon. The claim that science is approaching religion may be our version of the canines' confused perceptions.

When people lose their bearings, they will imagine them just as the test subject sees in inkblots or in ambiguous drawings his or her most basic concerns; few have grown up clean of religious influences, and the problem here is that of cosmic meaning. Even those who are scientifically trained waver when their assumptions are shaken. In the late 1970s some graduate biology students working at the environmental lab where I was employed seriously entertained Creationist ideas because of a crisis in defining the term *species* and so in understanding species' origins.

Bronislaw Malinowski observed that the Pacific islanders he lived with used magic and religion against anxiety. When they fished in calm, well known lagoons they skimmed on the spells, but when they ventured onto the ocean their supernatural preparations were elaborate and meticulous. Reaching beyond one's capacities has the same effect: Kurt Goldstein worked with brain injured soldiers who had to painstakingly structure and regulate environments they could once have mastered automatically.

And maybe the main reason science has come to resemble religion is not psychological but physiological. Persons tripping on LSD exclaim in wonder at the paisley patterns they see in everything; they are looking at the fluid that washes constantly over the surface of the eye to clean and protect it. Aeons ago mystics' imaginings had already gone through all the mind's available permutations and combinations because no reality checked their exercise of pure thought, and they sat in rapture as their neurons discharged in the absence of internal paradigms or external stimuli. When, like them, scientists use paradox and riddle, speak of time flowing in different directions on the subatomic level, of objects collapsing upon themselves to become infinitely heavy and finally to disappear and become a stream of energy "somewhere else," and especially of uncertainty principles of and states of objects being dependant upon the observer it is certainly legitimate for laypersons to question whether they are talking about things that really happen or whether they are simply baffled. Indeed, the last item is certainly nothing more than magic stated in erudite language—a latter day tale of genies and magic carpets—or a sensory deception: can we not decide which aspect of an optical illusion we will see?

This is not a conception of hopelessness. It refutes the claims that we *must* be religious and that science validates religion, claims that could permanently reestablish bigotry and fanaticism and curtail our minds far below capacity. Although it may yet be only those scientists who sound theological who have waded in beyond their depth, we must accept it that since intelligence depends on brain structure and brains are obviously finite, there is a limit to what we

Yet we are adequate to our self-appointed tasks and more. We can conquer disease and control aging, integrate high technology with nature, and colonize other worlds. And if we want our descendants to understand those things we cannot and to know whether the questions we ask *are* questions, we can turn with a fair degree of optimism, not to the physicist or the philosopher, but to the geneticist.

RATIONALLY SPEAKING

By Bernard Katz

Here's one more example against state support of religion. Supporters of prayers in public schools should take heed of the example of Great Britain where such longstanding institutional ritual has done nothing to reinvigorate religion, to enforce morality, or even to prevent the inroads of socialism.

Some Christian sects are bizarre in their activities. Aimee Semple McPherson roared down the aisle of Angelus Temple one Sunday on a motorcycle. Daddy Grace ("Grace has given God a vacation") baptized two hundred converts on the streets of Philadelphia with a fire hose. One sensation-seeking clergyman secreted himself on Easter morning in a coffin, had it brought into his church, and in the midst of the service leaped up crying: "Resurrection day has come!" Another clergyman, in order to advertise his services, introduced over the radio the following commercial, sung to the tune of "Little Brown Jug":

Mother knows what's good for you,
Go to church like she taught you to.
Brother we've got an empty pew,
Plainly labeled Y-O-U.

Acid-tongued William F. Buckley commented: "Let the little 8-year-old atheist simply stand there (during school prayer) if he doesn't want to leave the room and make points for his mum and do what other civilized people do, namely bow their heads and say nothing, and think about sex, if they want to contribute their own little personal iconoclasm."

Here is a scathing example against state support for religion. Sweden's Lutheran Church is established and supported by the government. Yet, as a former bishop of the Church of Sweden reported: "If the priest, the organist, and the attendants were not paid with tax money, and if the churches were not kept in repair and heated with tax money, they could not continue. Attendance at a typical Sunday morning service consists of an attendant, two men from the old people's home and, at times, the priest's wife."

The First Baptist Church in Providence, R.I., a congregation founded by none other than Roger Williams, decided to trade their birth right of "soul liberty" for \$170,000 in federal funds to help restore the church as an historical monument.

The mayor, an enthusiastic backer of the project, said: "There is a secular use that benefits all the people of this city (Providence)."

How odd. Roger Williams would argue that the building houses a church, and is there to accomplish a religious mission, not to serve as the centerpiece of a government project. Would he have compelled others to finance his religious enterprises? We believe he would not.

The publication "Education Week" shows that there are well over 4,000 fundamentalist Christian proselytizers operating in our public schools. These include such groups as Young Life, Campus Life, Campus Crusade and Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Tax exemptions for freethought groups around the world is the exception rather than the rule. In Australia, Britain and Germany, freethinkers do not have the tax-exempt privileges granted to the churches. In some Islamic countries unbelief is a crime.

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He Certainly Got Rid of the Evil Spirits

Andrew Sale, 24, after asking if she wanted everlasting life, tied his 70-year-old aunt's hands and feet and drowned her in the bathtub. Sale, a Jehovah's Witness, stated in court that he believed the woman was possessed by evil spirits and that he was trying to save her. He further claimed that he was Jesus, that he lived in Heaven, and that he had destroyed Satan. The court ordered that he be admitted to a high security mental hospital.

Why Not Crucify Them Both?

Craig Gardner, 26, and James Demaio, 27, were arrested on charges of disturbing the peace when Gardner, dressed as Jesus and carrying a large cross, walked down the street as Demaio, dressed as Pontius Pilate, pretended to beat him with a whip in what the two claimed was a re-enactment of the crucifixion. They said the case was a simple matter of freedom of speech.

Will the Druids Be Next?

Dr. Mohammad T. Mehdi, secretary general of the National Council on Islamic Affairs, is deeply concerned about the displays of Christmas trees and Hanukkah menorahs during December and is asking that the crescent and five-pointed star get equal time during the holy season of Ramadan in the spring. "The banks and post offices should honor Islam as they honor Christianity and Judaism," he stated.

Sounds More Like Water on the Brain

In recent months Christians by the tens of thousands have flocked to Tiacote, Mexico where there is a well of water that they believe has healing powers. Believing that the water will cure everything from terminal cancer to AIDS, the faithful come from all across Mexico and the United States and from as far away as Canada, Spain and Italy and wait in line for as much as three days in order to fill their jugs and bottles with the life-saving water. The well owner has

been giving the water away but stated that he plans to begin selling it soon.

"But the Coach Told Me to Exorcise It!"

Flavio Gomez, a rookie prospect for the Cleveland Indians, developed a sore hand during spring training and was afraid that it would prevent him from making the team. In search of a cure he went to a witch doctor who, convinced that his hand was possessed, pounded it with a hammer in order to drive out the evil spirits and broke it.

I Think He's All Wet

Israel's chief rabbi has declared a ban on the use of umbrellas in spite of torrential rains that have caused flooding in parts of the country. "You must not open an umbrella on the Sabbath," stated rabbi Mordechai Eliahou in a special ruling published recently in Jerusalem newspapers. Orthodox Judaism forbids the use of electrical and mechanical devices except in cases of emergency. For example, "if a man has been electrocuted or children are playing near an electric pylon downed by the wind or snow. But you must be sure not to use your finger to dial and instead use a pencil or any other such object," he said.

Fowler Water

Nancy Fowler, of Conyers, Georgia, has been asked by health officials to post a sign on her well stating that the water is contaminated. The Health Department took samples and found that the water contained coliform bacteria, was "unsatisfactory for drinking," and could cause diarrhea or stomach cramps. Ms. Fowler, who claims to see recurring apparitions of the Virgin Mary, says that the water was blessed when Jesus appeared to her and now invites the thousands of worshippers who come to her home each month to take samples of the water back home with them. Health officials cannot order the well shut because being on private property, it is not a public water supply and thus is not subject to governmental regulations.

Why is Astrology More Popular Than Psychology?

by David Morrow

That astrology not only remains popular but seems to have gained followers isn't just an effect of the New Age movement or the deterioration of education. At the Conservative revolution's zenith Nancy Reagan admitted to consulting astrologers. More people have come to see astrology as a better guide to personal insight and self-improvement as well as decision making than psychotherapy.

I made my own informal study of this, starting with a comparison of what persons experience when they consult astrologers and psychotherapists. I've known professionals in both practices and I'm definitely a rationalist, but my list, as modified by others' observations, proved more critical of psychotherapy. A conceptual framework developed by E. Fuller Torrey made the reason clear.

Astrology enjoys the prestige of longevity and immemorial roots, and the bare facts of its history are quite true. Most people know it dates from before ancient Babylon; that it began with early efforts to understand the world, predict and control events, and involved the development of agriculture, navigation, and timekeeping; that it has been a source of the sciences and was one of the first extensions of knowledge beyond immediate sensory perception. Astrology has been used as a guide to living in advanced civilizations and by many eminent and countless ordinary persons.

It is subtly and thoroughly embedded in Western culture. Astrology has contributed enormously to the arts in the form of motifs, symbols, and themes, and to the development of language. It appears in literature

from Chaucer to the daily papers, and in figures of speech. The original purpose of a jury of twelve was to achieve the supposedly balanced decision of a complete zodiac.

People know psychotherapy is a recent development in medicine. They've been taught that witches were mentally ill persons persecuted out of ignorance and that enlightened doctors have several times freed the insane from medieval abuse. Freud and his followers are more justifiably famous, but uncertainly so because of our ambivalent sexual attitudes. Therapists have publicly repudiated therapy's roots in religion and the occult and affirmed these roots when fashionable. Though based on upper class urban European and Euro-American culture and the latter's comparatively small population, its proponents don't hesitate to apply it everywhere.

During its brief span psychotherapy has stimulated much research, inspired interesting if bizarre schemata of the mind, and added terms like "complex" and "ego" to everyday speech. As psychoanalysis it inspired artistic styles like surrealism and some of the century's greatest literature, and in other forms produced a host of largely pessimistic writings and films.

Therapists' attempts to explain human culture look like debasing attacks: literature is "really" lust for a parent, Communion "nothing but" sublimated cannibalism (inadequate but not false). They have borrowed from traditional lore, usually after having ridiculed it, even such untestable concepts as spirit possession. For an example, see *The Journal of Past Life Therapy*.

Therapy arbitrarily changes with politics. The switch from trying to cure homosexuality to trying to get the public to accept it as an alternative lifestyle is a well known example. Dr. Richard Gardner has written of the recent fad of finding that almost everyone suffered sexual abuse as children. Therapists I worked with during the Vietnam War announced at first that all protestors were kids with bad relationships with their fathers. As the Anti-war Movement gained momentum and influence they announced that the protestors had legitimate complaints, but that their leaders had bad relationships with their fathers.

Therapists' standards, as I know from experience and anyone can glean from psychiatric writings, are individual preferences, community prejudices, and ideals of admired teachers, modified more or less by whatever theory they subscribe to. These theories vary so greatly it's hard to realize that they are about the same thing. Psychoanalysts believe the mind a powerful force and attribute behavior largely to unconscious factors. Behaviorists deny the existence of consciousness and the mind, insisting that mental operations can't be assumed.

Whenever possible therapists choose only certain patients. Integral to diagnosis, patient selection doesn't just mean distinguishing people with bad relationships or false learning from those with brain diseases. It means selecting articulate, especially pliable persons of similar background to the therapist, as shown in psychiatric textbooks and literature. One purpose is to minimize failure, also a reason some therapists cite unmeasurables like transference and intuition as critical to treatment.

Selection also eliminates the many persons therapists dislike. Their specific training and the nature of their profession make them elitist and arrogant. I once worked with Northeastern psychiatrists who simplified their speech and, save for "shock" purposes, avoided sounding non-fundamentalist when talking even to highly educated persons from the South or Texas. They bitterly criticized the latter's supposed racism yet held most Blacks and Hispanics too childish to treat because of linguistic and cultural factors the aloof, monolingual experts in behavior didn't grasp. Or admit. Since I'm from Texas, questioning their sectional and ethnic prejudices, even maintaining that I was an atheist, brought threats that I needed treatment. These fellows often had to see and treat persons who presented themselves or were referred, and it was obvious from their evaluations, their nonverbal comments, and their tendency simply to prescribe drugs that they did not like most people.

A single public standard, external to particular individuals, is the best deterrent to lies and coercion, and astrologers evaluate clients on the basis of traditional lore freely available in bookstores and libraries. True, astrologers can and sometimes do abuse clients, but unlike therapists they can't impose stigmatizing labels, much less drug, imprison, or perform surgery on someone who resists their findings. Because of this, astrology can work without being objectively true just as New Agers claim. Sun sign characteristics are a *MacGuffin*, a plot element whose purpose is to set a story in motion, allowing persons to develop habits of evaluating themselves without having to please a dangerous authority or accept a negative philosophy.

In true Enlightenment spirit, astrologers maintain that most persons are able to make rational decisions and that the more they know the better the decision; their role is to provide the knowledge their discipline is supposed to reveal. Because their advice is based on non-subjective data like persons' birthdates and the positions of astronomical bodies, it can be used with persons of every social, economic, and educational level, and any culture.

Astrologers can usually gain the tolerance even of staunch Fundamentalists by identifying themselves with Christian values—easily done since most of them belong to that religion. They can cite the Magi tale; the Magi, clearly astrologers, were among the first to worship Jesus, and they misinformed Herod as to His whereabouts. The correspondence of a dozen disciples to the twelve sun signs, actually indicative of an older underlying mythology, they can claim as proof astrology accords with God's design. Shrewder persons will realize that had the founders of Christianity opposed astrology they'd have edited out the Magi story and not made sure to maintain the apostolic zodiac by replacing Judas.

Psychotherapists claim to be scientific yet use untestable constructs like insight and transference. They venture into realms such as history where their discipline cannot be used (we can never know the unconscious or even most of the conscious motives of long dead people of foreign cultures). Shrinks fail to distinguish speculation from science, and have even seriously analyzed persons who like Shakespeare's

Hamlet have never existed.

Popular psychological literature shows that the field's basic assumptions, far from being objective, are negative. Norman Brown's *Life Against Death*, popular during the 1960s, postulates a being whose life is sickness, whose every act is a pathological symptom, whose culture is but the symbolic effort symbolic manifestation of repressed urge—Western culture of the urge to soil one's pants. B. F. Skinner's more recent *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* reduces people to helpless automata who for their own good must be controlled by psychologists, themselves, of course, helpless automata.

Despite the questionable assumption that the apparent positions of celestial objects correlate with individual's characters, astrology is rational. As currently practiced it falls in line with the belief that with knowledge people can choose the best course of action. It actually meets the scientific requirements that it be based on observations repeatable by different persons and that are both publishable and amenable to mathematical description.

Coercion is a major function of psychotherapy. Not only Soviet, but American political dissidents are regularly accused of mental problems, as in the case some years ago of General Edwin Walker. People arrested, especially for artificial crimes like prostitution and private intoxication, are often sentenced to therapy. Spouses trying to dominate their partners will demand marriage counseling to put the other on the defensive. On some pretext or other, bosses send good employees they dislike, on some pretext or other, to the company shrink to intimidate and smear them.

I have seen psychiatrists bully non-patients during ordinary social interactions and for no particular reason. One, for example, forced a person to accept the psychiatrist's statement of that person's political opinions by smirking condescendingly and repeating his account like a chant while the other tried to explain his position. Another got someone to deny his own feelings and accept the shrink's statement of them by prattling offhandedly, "Oh, you're not *that* schizophrenic. . . ."

People know when they are being abused and whether they have the means to resist it. Popular fiction like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and biographies like Francis Farmer's deal with how psychotherapy is used to circumvent the Constitution. Scientific evidence exists even of very subtle abuse. In the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (Number 19, 1956) R. Rosenthal reports that therapists rated as cured those patients whose attitudes changed toward theirs, whether or not those patients showed improved behavior or reported less subjective distress.

As most practice it, astrology is positive, non-coercive, and admits the limits of astrologers, who have scant opportunity to become little tin gods. Astrology is never used to smear political or social opponents or as a pretext to lock them up. Nobody is ever forced to consult an astrologer, to live by astrology, or to accept it as valid. Astrologers I've known who found someone behaving differently than expected would return to their calculations, whatever one cares to make of that, and attribute the error to their own oversight rather

than threaten the other person or pretend the behavior didn't happen. That society has realized astrology is invalid and so doesn't enforce it isn't the reason. Psychotherapy isn't valid, either, and were it not an official coercion tool it would be just another secular cult like Scientology.

Careful studies bear this out. In 1952 British psychologist H. J. Eysenck divided comparable patients into treated and untreated groups and found that two-thirds of each always improved. The Cambridge-Somerville Youth Study followed two groups of delinquent boys for eight years and found more arrests among the treated. When the Oakland, California Kaiser Foundation Hospital psychiatric clinic had to put patients on hold because of the number of referrals, the untreated were found after six months to have the same recovery rate as the treated. If astrology doesn't work at all, by these figures it works as well as psychotherapy.

Most people won't read these studies, but since they are the subjects they don't need to. Millions don't even feel better after years of treatment and whether or not they're aware of it their co-workers, friends, and families are. Others hang out in a bar or tell their beads or take up some occult study, and even if they don't draw the right conclusions as to why they get better, they know what didn't cure them.

Even popular media shows this. In *Rolling Stone* Number 358 (10 December, 1981) Carly Simon recalls to interviewer Timothy White that at age nineteen she ran off to the Grasse District of France with a boyfriend and while living there with him began suffering nervous spells and tremors. At her mother's urging she returned to New York and underwent Freudian analysis until the symptoms stopped and she was declared cured. Celebrating at a French restaurant, she suffered a relapse and discovered that she was allergic to a chemical in Grasse wines. And what of the repressed traumas, the psychic realities, the uncovered symbolic emotional meanings that first "cured" her?

In *Witchdoctors and Psychotherapists*, his cross cultural study of mental healers, E. Fuller Torrey writes that all successful ones have four properties: a worldview shared with the patient, certain personal qualities, the expectations of the client, and an emerging sense of mastery in the latter.

Most Americans certainly share astrologers' and not therapists' worldview, as shown by the above comparisons. People at least think that they believe in reason, individual autonomy, and personal responsibility, even though most of them also believe in some form of religion. Therapists' assumption that behavior is determined, that people are helpless and non-responsible, and that their cherished beliefs are nonsense are the opposite. This ideological difference and the use of coercion associates psychotherapy with totalitarianism and, despite most therapists' elitist pretensions, with social disorder.

This difference in worldviews causes therapy's other negative qualities vis-a-vis astrology and religion. Most people expect as advisers someone wise and tactful who understands their outlook and has a realistic respect for their competence as well as the ability

to use constructively the materials of their lives. Popular media and the personal experiences on which they are based tell patients that their problems are but an indictment of their background and everything important to them ("If that society weren't male dominated..." or "It's all his mother's fault..."). The therapist who has to see patients he or she doesn't like, most of them for instance, will likely just prescribe drugs or refer them through a gamut of groups and agencies.

Since therapists usually put them further on the defensive, most often without helping them solve any problems, few meet any client's expectations who does not want to be coerced. This leads to a sense of mastery only in those who milk treatment for its hypochondriacal benefits or who manipulate the therapist to escape the law. Using people's troubles as a pretext to demonstrate one's superiority or to convert them to a foreign ideology without solving any problems is not a way of helping them achieve mastery.

It's easy to see why so many people have turned to

astrology: its cure rate must be the same as psychotherapy's and it tactfully provides a positive rather than a negative and demeaning outlook. Astrology and most similar disciplines are more in accord with American values than psychotherapy. Educated persons may object that values are different from scientific reasons, which is true. This doesn't make any difference, however, since in the absence of utterly miraculous benefits an idea is accepted or rejected on the basis of its social milieu rather than its future usefulness or ability to explain things.

Once non-religion was common in America, and freedom of religion was written into the Constitution. Now the opposite is true and tolerance and progress are threatened. Is this partly because atheism has, so to speak, been keeping bad company and alienated itself from those very values it helped form? Perhaps in the success of astrology there is a lesson not just for mental healers, but those who would like to return to a practical, less superstitious society.

Retroactive Logic

by Marc Goldstein

In between periods of obnoxious music, my local supermarket has been playing "messages" which are thinly disguised advertising, often telling the shoppers about Great Medical Truths, and why they mean we should buy their products. Lately, they have been broadcasting a message that tells us "Studies have shown that people who don't eat a good breakfast are more likely to be late for work..." and then goes on to advertise the latest breakfast cereal.

The first time I heard this message, I noticed that the other shoppers did not seem to share my amusement, and began backing away from my barely suppressed giggles, some of them carefully shielding their children from this madman who was laughing apparently at nothing. I found it hard to explain why I found this ad comical, even to those few customers that would listen.

Of course people who are going to be late for work are unlikely to eat a good breakfast. If I oversleep, or for some other reason am likely to miss my bus, I am quite likely to forego breakfast. The problem with the message was its implied statement that not eating breakfast *causes* one to be late for work. If this is true, they'll have to come up with better evidence than that to convince me.

One of the most common methods in pursuing a logical argument is a conditional, an "if-then" statement. If such a statement is accepted as valid, it means that if the antecedent ("if" statement) is true, then the consequent ("then" statement) *must* also be true. It means nothing else, and it does *not* work in reverse.

One important consequence of this method of reasoning is that once the consequent is accepted as undeniably true, the antecedent doesn't really matter at all. Thus, "If the moon is made of green cheese, then George Bush is President of the United States" is a

perfectly valid statement, and will continue to be so as long as George Bush remains President. It does not, however, tell us anything whatsoever about the moon.

When the statements involved are a little less obvious than this, however, a skillful advertiser, or a person who is determined to believe something is true, can easily turn the situation around, and appear to prove that the moon is made of green cheese. This is what I call "retroactive logic." It's often quite convincing. Sometimes, as in the above case, it is just silly. But often it can lead to serious errors in reasoning, and nonsensical, even dangerous conclusions.

This sort of argument, for example, was commonly used in the 1960s to "prove" the grave dangers of marijuana. "Ninety percent of all heroin addicts 'started' on marijuana," a verifiable and perhaps correct statement, is the starting point. From this, it was supposedly "proven" that smoking marijuana in some way "led to" or "caused" heroin addiction.

Of course, this is nonsense. A statement about heroin users, as a group, proves nothing about marijuana smokers, as a group. It merely indicates that most people desperate enough for an escape from reality to use something as dangerous as heroin are likely to use something like marijuana first, because it is cheaper, easier to find, and almost certainly less damaging. Whatever real dangers marijuana may present, I have seen no evidence whatsoever that a large proportion of people who smoke this plant become addicted to heroin.

A similar argument has been used many times to justify racism. As a group, black people (in the United States) tend to be less well educated, poorer, and more likely to commit criminal acts, than white people. Therefore, they are inferior, and must be treated as such. But again, we are "proving" the antecedent merely by accepting the consequent as apparently

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THE ALTERNATIVE TO RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION

Lucifer: A New Appraisal

by Thomas Vernon

Beyond Katz's "Why Religion?"

by Hank Simpson

Life, Death and Mind Transfer

Otto Mann, Ph.D.

Forgotten Freethinkers #8

Ernestine L. Rose

by Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

On Rational Explanations

by David C. Morrow



On Rational Explanations

by David C. Morrow

Strange reports followed Austria's 1718 annexation of Serbia and Wallachia. There, and throughout the Balkans, sober educated imperial officers saw peasants take drastic action against dead persons they suspected of unsavory nocturnal activities. Exhuming them by daylight, they deemed guilty of vampirism any corpse found still pliable, fleshy, even bloated, especially those with bloody mouths. Wrapping these suspects to contain eruptions of putrescence, the peasants would stake them through the heart, often to hear them moan, sigh, even utter what seemed cryptic words.

These reports have inspired much fiction and pseudo-science, but Paul Barber, a research associate at UCLA's Fowler Museum of Cultural History, is probably the first to submit them to coroners and forensic anthropologists. These experts pronounced them medically accurate. To digest, if that's an appropriate word, the findings Barber gives in *Vampires, Burial, and Death*, unembalmed bodies buried in coffins don't necessarily decay rapidly. Rigor mortis is temporary and blood can remain liquid. Eventually stomach and intestines ferment, bloating the body with gas that collapses the lungs and forces blood out the mouth. Disturbing the corpse can force gas across its vocal chords or make it explode. No doubt forgotten incidents at some forgotten time involving such cadavers seemed to prove to Balkan natives their superstitions about malignant motives of the deceased.

During the 1930s Australian prospector Michael Leahy looked for gold in previously isolated parts of New Guinea. In 1933 his expedition reached a tribe whose members, after their initial shock, stood around the prospectors' camp peering hopefully at Leahy and his associates, pointing and talking excitedly till a few, overcome with joy, tried to hug them. Calling out in a language only they knew, often with tear streaked faces, they beckoned the caucasians to join them. When Leahy struck camp these same persons followed to the limits of their territory, weeping with grief, beseeching, even clinging to the Australians.

Researching their account of Leahy's explorations, *First Contact*, Robin Anderson and Bob Connolly found out the reason for such behavior. These natives had believed that the spirits of the dead went east and turned white, and took Leahy's men for returning dead when they came from that direction. As they studied the Australians a few saw some familiar mannerism, a characteristic walk, heard certain inflections. Though the natives joyfully invited them home to feasts, the supposed revenants ignored them

to go poking about in the river and examining rocks till for mysterious reasons they abandoned their "kindred" to renewed grief.

Examples of such behavior that range from world changing events through local misfortunes to ludicrous incidents are found in American history. Cortez arrived in Mexico precisely when and where the god Quetzalcoatl was expected. Uncertain as to the cut-throats' identity, Emperor Moctezuma II admitted them to the capitol; once capable of overwhelming the Spaniards, the Aztecs hesitated in their theological dilemma through the incubation period of the invaders' smallpox till they could attack only with an army of the sick and dying. Napoleon Chagnon tells how a long and deadly feud began when Yanomamo villagers attributed a series of infant deaths to evil spirits sent by inhabitants of a nearby town. When a man from there innocently came to visit a local leader split his head with an ax. In *Apaches*, James L. Haley relates that some Apaches were sacking a town where they were stricken with fear when they came upon a talking parrot. The warriors fled in terror of what they took to be a mighty sorcerer.

These examples show the effects of supernatural belief. The West's highest achievement, the free exchange and logical testing of ideas and information, even of cherished beliefs, has freed us from much of this. Except for experts working on scientific or legal questions, only lunatics dig up and handle corpses. It wouldn't occur to anyone save a few cultists that the dead might come trooping across field and meadow, while only an idiot would take alien invaders for deities. But this most vital of revolutions isn't complete and might well be reversed. Religion still wields great power both as established churches and fringe groups. Crystal gazing and palmistry are thriving concerns. Some radical feminists blame all the world's problems on men just as unrealistically as the Yanomamo blamed the actions of germs on their neighbors—and many believe them.

There are less obvious dangers to reason. A current idea appealing to those with more education than brains to keep it in is that the Colonial era Apaches, for instance, inhabited an alternate reality wherein sorcerers actually wielded their fabled powers and could become or enchant birds. They did not. They inhabited but held some mistaken ideas about the only reality; they believed in magic and didn't know there were birds that could imitate speech, as their descendants who tell the story know well. The same is true of the Slavs, whose "vampires" are perfectly described by mortuary science. Otherwise, Mexican

Indians, Papuans, and others couldn't have changed their beliefs, much less explain how and why. But reason's success can also lead to self-defeating dogmatism.

From the beginning of the scientific revolution Christianity has been under study. In 1681 Thomas Burnet insisted that since natural law and biblical miracles were alike God's work, Noah's flood could be reconciled with science. According to Stephen J. Gould clergy and scientists both took a dim view of this. Around 1695 Edmund Halley suggested (no surprise) that the flood was due to a cometary collision after he calculated that forty inches of rain for forty days and nights would produce a mere 130 feet of water. So began a series of attempts to explain spectacular biblical events leading to realistic theories as well as those of Velikovski and of latter day creationists.

If most now concede that the flood was limited to Iraq, many still defend the complete literalness of other prodigies. The parting of the Red Sea is a favorite for natural explanations, most recently by Doron Nof, a professor of oceanography at Florida State University, and Nathan Poldor, a Hebrew University professor of atmospheric science. *Biblical Archaeology Review* for September/October of 1992 explains that their computer model shows that a forty mile per hour northwest wind (not an east wind as in Exodus) can push the waters of a certain shallow area of the north edge of the Gulf of Suez into two walls of surf separated by a sandbar. Next in popularity is the supposed Star of Bethlehem, variously classified as a comet, a planetary conjunction, a supernova, or as that surpassingly natural object, a UFO.

Popularization of science and increased knowledge brought explanations of less spectacular matters. In 1848 a German scientist named Ehrenburg showed that the red spots sometimes seen on communion wafers and long held to be Jesus' blood appearing as a special favor to the pious, were bacteria colonies. Neurologists and anthropologists realized that most miracle cures were the power of suggestion acting on hysteria and apparent resurrections awakenings from comas. Stage magicians could duplicate levitation, appear to remove and restore body parts, seem to turn water to wine, and so forth. Archaeologists recovered statues of gods with built in speaking tubes. The transports and visions of mystics were credited to mental illness and more recently to psychedelic drugs.

Science also turned up Ur, Jericho with quake shattered walls, and other sites. An Egyptian reference to a Hyksos ruler named Jakob-her, hymns to Aton paralleling biblical verses, revealing Gnostic texts all came to light. Evidence of persons mentioned in the Bible—independent written references to Pontius Pilate and others, the tomb of Caiphas—have been found. By the time it was virtually rationalist dogma that the Bible is mere fable the evidence once leading to such a conclusion was undermining it.

One advantage of science is its ability to revise and discard inadequate ideas. Eighteenth century European scholars took conquistadors' accounts of gleaming cities with libraries and zoos, of paved highways trod by huge armies to be exaggerations; a century later science had proven what South Americans knew all along. The same persons thought that the great

cities of Vedic lore, as they did Troy and Mycenae, were at best but rude villages till the discoveries of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and of Homeric sites. The simplest conclusion, indeed the one most detrimental to superstition, is that much of the Bible is based on reality.

The Bible's authors and editors and the people they approved of had a supernatural orientation. They thought the world had a supernatural origin and purpose, history being the latter's unfolding. They didn't distinguish fact from myth, but rather between facts and myths that supported their beliefs and those that did not. They classified others' gods as demons and rejected rational Greek cosmologies in favor of ancient Semitic myth. They couldn't therefore discount embellishments in the oral legends they wrote down, and they illustrated their ideas with works of fiction like the Book of Job that their followers took for history.

Certainly many biblical authors witnessed and took part in the events they described, including in their accounts specific and recognizable details, but like the Papuans, the Yanomamo, and others they interpreted supernaturally things we, and doubtless even most of today's believers, would understand differently and more realistically. Some may have been duped by magicians or overlooked things to advance their cause; there are long lost Gnostic texts suggesting that the Resurrection was actually staged, but was rigid, with one Simon of Cyrene taking Jesus' place on the cross.

This is no new idea and it isn't one atheists should have any problems with. Historians can agree that men named Agamemnon, Odysseus, *et al* likely did form a Mycenaean coalition against Illium around 1200 B.C. without agreeing that these fellows conversed with Athena and Zeus. Likewise, agreeing that much of the Bible is true in the sense that most of the people it mentions actually lived and most of the events it records, however garbled in the retelling, actually happened is not the same thing as agreeing that God, angels, and Jesus' divinity are objective realities. Maybe some secretly fear it is, but in fact since this interpretation accounts for the evidence in the simplest manner it is opposed to superstition and can help move even believers away from it.

During the last few centuries many, starting with clergy and scientists and today including ordinary persons, have devised rational explanations of religious phenomena and Bible stories. Religion sometimes gains, sometimes loses in this still developing revolution, but today science has so permeated society that even staunch believers prefer to defend their faiths with appeals to reason. It is a mistake at this point for atheists to be dogmatic, not only because they may be mistaken on some point, but because a believer who uses science has actually accepted the rational and given up the supernatural orientation whether or not he or she realizes it.

When he claims that unusual weather conditions parted the Red Sea or that the hypothetical "mitochondrial Eve" bears out Genesis, he effectively denies that supernatural forces control the world. Whether she says that the person known to us as St. John the Divine was writing coded messages to his brethren or tripping out on mushrooms, she is not likely to come

up with one of those interpretations of Revelation that have caused so much misery.

Rather than make them more disposed to revert to superstition by making them emotionally defensive, atheists should find grounds for agreement in the historicity of biblical persons and should be positive toward religious persons' attempts to use natural law to account for the things they believe. If in this day and age religious persons, leaders especially, can get scholars and even atheists to agree with them in their appeals to reason, then they are moved further from belief in the supernatural even if they imagine they have scored a victory for it.

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At Random

Freethought News from the Realm of Literature and the Arts by Walter Hoops

The statement in the Tripoli Treaty of 1797 by Joel Barlow, American diplomat "as the government of the United States is in any sense founded on the Christian religion" has often been quoted. George Washington approved the treaty as written but he did not write it. When the Senate ratified the treaty then President John Adams signed it and added this statement: "Now, be it known, that I, John Adams, President of the United States of America, having seen and considered the said treaty, do, by and within the consent of the Senate, accept, ratify and confirm the same, and every clause and article thereof."

I am quoting this from *The Great Thoughts* by George Seldes.

• • •
The efforts of religious groups to present scientific evidence for the worldwide Flood and Noah's Ark are going on and on. CBS-TV was lately induced to show "The Incredible Discovery of Noah's Ark" as a scientific investigation. Any scientific examination would have shown that the so-called experts of the story have very dubious credentials. How low does the credibility of prime-time TV has to sink?

• • •
Bravo to the efforts to ban the Bible from public schools on the grounds that it is obscene. Gene Kasper of a school district near Minneapolis cited on 20 pages biblical references to explicit sex, child abuse, incest, scatology, nakedness, concubines and the mistreatment of women. The school board turned him down.

• • •
Andrew Greeley, the Catholic priest and prolific writer of novels and other works critical of the Church, has now published *Fall from Grace* which deals with sexual abuse by priests. Many diocesan newspapers have rejected ads for this book. Greeley considers this action an example of the most extreme Catholic conservatives.

A new film about Jesus to be called "Christ the Man" is in preparation. It is by Paul Verhoeven known for his sex and violence epics. Verhoeven belongs to no church but says that he is in search "for my self, for God—or is there a God?"

• • •
The Devils of Loudon, a novel written in 1961 by Aldous Huxley is now being made into an opera by Indiana State University. Huxley treated the story as fiction but the trouble actually started way back in 1634 when the prioress of an Ursuline convent developed a crush on the very handsome father Grandier who was no model priest but he did not deserve torture and death.

• • •
I lately discovered that there exists an active "Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment" in London that performs on "period instruments." It performs under the baton of Sir Charles Mackerras who is also the Musical Director of the Welsh Opera. Among music lovers this ensemble has the reputation of having performed the first genuinely authentic rendering ever of Schubert's 9th Symphony (The Great).

• • •
Amulets and charms are selling well all over the country and not only in "New Age" shops. Especially popular are rings, necklaces, beads, pins and dolls. Catholics prefer models with images of their patron saint. A study showed that 162 such products were advertised in supermarket tabloids.

• • •
A new book *The People V. Clarence Darrow* by Geoffrey Cowan has appeared dealing principally with the trial of the McNamara brothers' attempt to dynamite the Los Angeles Times building. Although the author calls Darrow "perhaps the greatest lawyer in American history" he attempts to diminish Darrow's reputation. I did not buy this effort but enjoyed the intrigues and the super-duper courtroom scenes.

The American

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JOSH McDOWELL'S CHARADE

by Gordon Stein, Ph.D.

JUST A PARAGRAPH OR TWO ABOUT GOD

by C. Lee Hubbell

IS THERE A "RELIGIOUS GENE?"

by Bernard Katz

THE PERENNIAL FALLACY

by David C. Morrow

THE RIDDLE OF THE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIST

by Richard J. Goss



THE PERENNIAL FALLACY

by David C. Morrow

When I was a ninth grader, no more religious than now, I had a staunchly fundamentalist friend. We got along despite some sparring, though one day at school when he innocently clarified a religious assumption I may have affected the course of his thinking. Before the first class bell he turned to me with the relieved satisfaction of a prosecutor who has finally seen through a defendant's alibi.

"If evolution is true," he asked, "why don't the monkeys that live today turn into men?"

I burst out laughing upon which he fled bearing what I took for a hurt expression. I tried to catch up and apologize, maybe at least attempt an explanation of geological time and biological adaptation.

"They aren't trying to change into anything."

He evaded me, insisting, "Get away! Keep away!"

My concern over his feelings lasted until our post lunch shop class. There, in subdued, puzzled tones he confided, "David, I'm surprised the Lord didn't strike you dead for laughing."

"Aaaarrgh!" I exclaimed, clutching my chest in mock throes. Astonished in my turn that what I'd taken for a pained escape from the source of hurt feelings was a panic stricken attempt to clear the Lord's impact area, I could only resort to humor.

"No," he said, shaking his head sadly. "If the Lord struck someone dead the whole school would know about it."

"You mean lightning would strike?"

"Yes!"

"Out of a clear sky?"

"Yes!" he said, almost angrily, confirming my sudden realization. I decided to drop the subject for the time being.

I could see how perplexed he was, how hard he was working on a problem that for me did not exist. How would he finally solve it? Like most people, scientist or not, he was trying to make sense of apparent inconsistencies in the world—but without considering the possibility of evaluating his basic beliefs. This is what has given us such "proofs" of God's existence and humanity's special creation as the argument from design, from statistics, and from the supposed need for a final cause.

Creationists cite the arrangement of our solar system as proof of God's existence and our special standing. If it were nearer the Sun, Earth would like Venus be too hot for life; if further away it would like Mars be too cold. Its gravity holds down a suitable amount of gas and liquid without being oppressive. Unlike other known planets, ours has oxygen and carbon dioxide in the right quantities to support life and screen our harmful radiation. Water is plentiful and exactly right to sustain life: neither too acidic nor basic, it expands when it freezes, and at Earth's temperature range exists in all three states of matter. And so on.

If Earth alone were created specifically to nurture life, why isn't there just a single properly situated world? We might venture that the other planets' primal inhabitants all sinned more grievously than

Adam and Eve, but that not only undermines the assertion that Earth was singularly designed for life. It also leaves us wondering what those despicable alien ingrates could possibly have done. This "proof" actually raises questions and demands more elaborate rationalizations, but though it clarifies nothing it does have the virtue of reducing to the simple and undeniable truth that if things were not as they are they would be otherwise.

Seemingly more compelling for its use of a scientific idea is "proof" via the improbability of our existence. Using the outdated assumption popularized by Sir Julian Huxley that evolution operates wholly by chance, Creationists argue that the likelihood of random chemical combinations yielding organic compounds is small, that because of this complexity the chance of any particular type of cell or organ developing is yet less likely and that the possibility humans would arise is astronomically small. Therefore, they assert, things must have originated as Genesis relates.

Disproving a theory would not necessarily disprove all but one of its alternatives (like the Hindu or Yanomami creation stories), and because of other logical and factual flaws this argument disproves nothing. It maintains that since the outcome of a process is no more likely to have resulted than all the possible outcomes that did not result, then the process itself could not have taken place. That is, if the chances of someone winning a state lottery are twenty million to one, then unless the contest does not really take place or the state rigs it the winner could not have won.

In fact, life has proven less improbable and evolution much less random than once thought. Organic compounds are produced by common chemical processes. Amino acids are found even in meteorites. Around the time I wasn't struck dead, Stanley Miller and Harold Urey produced them by duplicating Earth's hypothetical early atmosphere in a flask. In *Wisdom of the Genes* (1989) Christopher Wills shows that since there are—of course—limits to a gene's form, and that that form necessarily, by definition, constrains the nature of the structures that can arise from it, there are limits to the immediate changes possible to both. A grasshopper egg may hatch an insect with a thicker exoskeleton than its parents had, but not one with lungs. Creationists, in this "proof," are trying to turn a refuted idea into its own refutation.

Whoever uses it, the first cause "proof" is meaningless. Creationists argue that everything must have a cause, therefore God exists and Genesis is true. The questionable logic is just a symptom of a more fundamental flaw. Asking where God comes from leads to an infinite regress. However, it's just as easy to fall into the same trap by asking an astrophysicist what came before the Big Bang. In my opinion such unanswerable questions represent cognitive illusions or blind spots, results, like their optical counterparts, of our neurological limitations. They may involve real

problems whose elements humans cannot fully discern or organize, or they may be nonsense comparable to asking what causes Tuesday.

But there is an answer to whether theists are right based on the need motivating both religion and science. What theists can't directly explain or control they can attribute to God. When someone gets sick or has an accident, it might be His work; maybe the Lord has some plan or maybe He's pissed off. It's not only futile to oppose such power by trying to improve things, but it could be blasphemous to ask God's reasons and methods. Believers must in the long run accept their wretchedness and appeal emotionally to its supposed source.

Persons who assume natural causes even for things they don't understand can look directly at illness and accident. They can find and learn how to deal with germs and unsafe conditions. The virtual elimination of smallpox and abatement of other diseases, the developing control of genetic disorders, are results of a response to pain and fear that immediately, personally affect individuals. They are not the outcome of trying to influence supernatural entities with prayer and candles, but of controlled reasoning about measurable natural events. The religious approach may allay fear, but as during the Black Plague (easily curable today) it cannot create the true and ultimately positive outlook that the control of physical reality does.

Both orientations, the belief one is the special concern of deities and the effort to control one's surroundings, are responses to anxiety and suffering. A flexible intelligence naturally has to learn that dealing with a problem's observable causes solves it while alternative actions do not. The latter seems to work because people do need to feel loved and cared for and because some problems cannot be solved. Applied to modern knowledge, it makes theists see Earth and its solar system as arranged like a playground for our special benefit. They can conceive of evolution, if at all, only as a process similar to gestation and intended to produce *Homo sapiens*. They often have trouble telling rationalization from revision, and so can overlook such things as the results of comparing Medieval or Third World with modern Western medicine.

We lived in the same direction from school and when after the last bell he and another friend, a calm and sensible person, joined me as I walked home it was obvious the fundamentalist had all day pondered my survival. Many, he affirmed when I pointed out that I was still alive and healthy, were indeed struck down. Discovered dead, they were assumed to have suffered heart attacks. Possibly it would have happened not only in private, but quietly; no lightning, no thunder. As we passed to a dirt road where the pavement ended and started across a vacant lot he continued. I had been spared because I'd meant no harm or hadn't known better.

"Go ahead," I demanded, laughing and beckoning the sky, "Strike me dead. C'mon. C'mon."

"No," he said, silently and with reverent caution. "You have to *defy* Him . . ."

Scarcely had he spoken when I stopped and faced east as though by forgotten habit while, guessing my intent the two of them sped up slightly, hoping it was

inconspicuously, to get out of *God's* way. I pointed determinedly at the scarcely plumbed blue of 1959 and shouted, "I *defy* you to strike me dead!"

Unscathed again, I caught up. Our friend was amused, if relieved; how he turned out and what opinions he developed I don't know. The fundamentalist laughed nervously, steering further conversation away from the subject.

I can't be sure whether this particular incident in our philosophical jousting charged his subsequent development, but it was a clear refutation of his beliefs on their own terms that did help me define an enduring basis of religion. To his credit, he certainly devoted considerable thought to it. For the rest of the time I knew him he was trying various, increasingly bizarre religious hypotheses—one of the reasons we didn't stay friends. I often wondered whether he had relinquished or rationalized his conviction that somehow, in whatever abstract or indirect a manner, he was the Center of the Universe.

Twenty-five years after the Lord did not strike me dead, and long after I'd last seen him, the fundamentalist called me when my mother died.

"It's alright," he said in sententious consolation. "I've studied the occult for many years, and I know that the personality continues to exist. . . ."

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**Remember to renew your subscription
or to order extra copies of AR to
distribute to others.**

QUOTELINE

by B. Katz

"GOD, SAVE ME FROM YOUR FOLLOWERS."

This is the button sold at the Magic Moon, a small store shut-down in "Fort God"—as Jonesboro, Ark., is called—that sells sacred objects to the followers of Wicca. The "Born Again Pagan" community has recently been under fire from Christians. (There are 75 churches and dozens of independent congregations.) The Rev. Gary Taylor of the United Christian church said: "Those kind of things do not belong in a Christian community." And about the First Amendment: "I'm very patriotic and appreciate our freedom of religion. I just don't believe this is a religion."

—From "Do You Believe in Magick?"
Newsweek, Aug. 23, 1993

• • •

"This is proof that God is a woman."

—Colorado's feminist congresswoman, Pat Schroeder, to a bishop who promised to send her a video from the Right-to-Life movement just as it began to rain as the Pope began his first speech at Denver.

—From "A Reign of Prayers,"
Newsweek, Aug. 23, 1993

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"A person who procures a completed abortion incurs an automatic excommunication."

—Roman Catholic Penal Canon 1308

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THE DISCOVERED UNIVERSE

by David C. Morrow

**THE BIBLE:
A WORTHLESS GUIDE TO SEXUAL CONDUCT**

by Alex Simpson

**THE GREED OF A KING AND THE
PERFIDY OF A POPE**

by Walter Hoops

**WHAT ABOUT THAT OL' TIME RELIGION—
AND ITS FAMILY VALUES?**

by Bernard Katz

IS ATHEISM IMPORTANT?

by Richard E. Stratton

THE DISCOVERED UNIVERSE

by David C. Morrow

Today it's acceptable if not expected to admit that science doesn't operate by reason alone and hasn't succeeded just by delivering the material goods. This isn't a mere concession to the psychologizing fad. Some of the profoundest, most elegantly precise logic is found in theological works even though the long ages of religious predominance were long ages of glacial progress compared to the brief Classical respite they engulf and especially to the last hundred years. Computers, nuclear fission, space flight, and vaccines can't explain the steady spread of scientific thinking since the Renaissance because during the majority of those centuries such achievements were beyond our grasp. There is another, overlooked factor best seen in a comparison of cosmologies.

The basic Judeo-Christian-Islamic account of things is a story of divine creation whose focus moves swiftly from the physical through the living realms to that of mind and culture where it stops after this quick preface with one people among many. Everything appears complete and well explained in a world snug enough to be comfortable, even secure. We're told how things came to be, why there are troubles, and how to act so that God will heal and reward us—somewhere, sometime, if not here and now.

From outside, or even with a bit of reflection by an astute believer, creational representations show, like illustrations in children's books, a cartoonish quality, with thickly defined outlines, colors few and bright with little tone and shading, with relative size representing depth. What seem the adult themes of responsibility and self-control are but that of paternal authority; given no generally usable theory, we are told to submit unquestioningly to God. Ethics is an important matter, but what we are told is clearly incomplete. There's no explanation of why events in China aren't important enough to mention, why kangaroos limited themselves to Australia, why Jupiter should be so huge, or for the myriad other things a healthy mind notices. Questions about such things enrage believers, sending them into frenzies of rationalization and till recently of killing, torture, and terrorism.

The created world compared to the universe discovered by science isn't just childlike, but brief, shallow, incredibly cruel, and a conglomeration of disparate elements. It has existed and will exist but a few thousand years, little changed save by the occasional catastrophe God sends to criticize us and by permissible human activities like agriculture and mining. There's nothing beyond the farthest visible horizon, at least nothing we'd better concern ourselves with, and little here we really need to know about, however vast or complex or compelling. The world is filled with suffering, including not only animals—meaningless without evolution—but of that majority of people who go to hell for thinking or for lack of the "right" teachings. Humans alone have a soul, a spiritual substance utterly different from the mere matter it's imposed on and in conflict with. And since we shouldn't ask unauthorized questions we can do little but hope and

pray.

The discovered universe may be infinite and it is infinitely interesting. It extends beyond reach, full of worlds and the possibilities of worlds. Earth itself has endured for millennia of eons. Continents have collided and sundered, seas ebbed and expanded, ice and tide and wind have shaped the stones. In forest and meadow and watery deep uncountable dramas have befallen beings whose lines flourished and changed or perished.

It is comforting, not degrading, that we are one among them, that we grew out of the world, our awareness and intelligence natural developments rather than estranging impositions. Evolved through ages of trial, objective curiosity is a great strength whose use, as a survival mechanism like that of sex, can be pleasurable in itself. These adaptations that enable us to eat well and alleviate suffering can also enable us to understand the life cycles of the most obscure creatures and the hidden structure of mountains, and from seeking such knowledge the real nature of things emerges before us.

That unfinished work began in earnest at the time Classical learning and art were revived. When exact measurement was systematically applied to then politically safe topics like artillery, navigation, and painting people came to realize its pragmatic value in combination with replicable experiment and formal logic. Realistic art, mathematically precise depictions of the tangible world, returned to replace stereotypes of arcane ideals even in religious works just as a world made more accessible drew people on voyages of discovery by ships and through glass lenses.

Thus, goes the familiar if currently maligned history, began the expansion of scientific thought and practice that continues despite setbacks and adulterations in popular thought with other philosophies. In that day and age people cannot have been rewarded with those miracles that have only recently been achieved, nor were financial returns for a long time as routine as persecution. Indeed, a child today can seldom count on immediately making world shaking discoveries or amassing a swift fortune or scoring a social coup as a result of his or her interest in science. Here we are back to the neglected factor.

"Freedom," declares the rock opera *Tommy*, "tastes of reality." Reason can be applied as easily to fantasy as to reality. When it is used to bolster the imaginings and rationalizations of the powerful, even just the charismatic, people are compelled to identify their societies with all of nature. The world becomes a closed, stifling place where etiquette and status have to be accorded the force of physical laws and creativity can at best only mean new routes to acceptable conclusions. Questions that aren't officially approved threaten society, whatever their subject, bringing rage, hatred, persecution. Little new arises, discoveries are few, and that sublime feeling of mystery that Einstein considered the most beautiful, most pleasurable of experiences, becomes dangerous.

The modern scientific outlook took hold and continues to grow because in dealing with actual reality it liberates us into a cosmos that is accessible, beautiful, and interesting. The discovered universe is more aesthetically pleasing, more rewarding, more sheer, utter fun than the cramped, procrustean, angry little world of creation, and that is the neglected secret of the success of real science.

NOTICE

IF YOU ARE A COLLEGE STUDENT OR FACULTY MEMBER AND WOULD LIKE TO ARRANGE A DEBATE ON YOUR CAMPUS ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, BETWEEN DR. GORDON STEIN AND A THEIST, PLEASE WRITE TO DR. STEIN AT P.O. BOX 972, AMHERST, NY 14226. DR. STEIN'S EXPENSES ARE ALL PAID FROM A GRANT.

THE BIBLE: A WORTHLESS GUIDE TO SEXUAL CONDUCT

by Alex Simpson

For over 1500 years the Bible and its fanatic adherents have set the standard of sexual conduct for the Western World. The damage this has done to the psyche of Occidental humanity is incalculable. The plethora of neuroses, psychoses, perversions, crimes, suicides, diseases, dysfunctions and general unhappiness caused, directly or indirectly, by Christian sexual morality is apparent to anyone who deeply examines the subject.

The purpose of this article is not to explain how Christian sexual attitudes spoil lives but to show precisely how the Bible, particularly the New Testament, views normal sex and how this view disqualifies the Bible from being a reasonable criterion for sexual behavior.

The Bible is a mishmash of myths, folk tales, history, imagination, inconsistencies and contradictions. Much of it has been borrowed from other religions. This melange has been reworked and retranslated countless times. As a result, the Bible can be made to say nearly anything. This is accomplished by fervently promoting those verses that literally support one's opinion and negating those passages whose literal meaning is contrary to the desired point of view.

This negation is accomplished by one of the following methods:

- 1) Ignore the troublesome text (the most common procedure).
- 2) Apply some arcane, symbolic or other nonliteral interpretation so that the opposing verses are bought into line with one's opinion or at least neutralized.
- 3) Impugn the translation of the wayward passages.
- 4) Claim that the obvious, literal meaning of thorny verses is taken out of context.

The Christian fanatic will usually assert that his or her interpretation of Scripture is correct because the "Holy Spirit" guides him or her. However, there seems to be little uniformity how the "Holy Spirit" guides people as witnessed by the proliferation of hundreds of different Christian sects all based on pet interpretations.

To demonstrate that the Bible is no reasonable guide in sexual matters, I have before me six common translations:

- 1) King James (KJ) 1611
- 2) Revised Version (RV) 1880, 1884 (evolved into the Revised Standard Version of 1952)

3) Holy Bible in Modern English by Ferrar Fenton (FF) 1903

4) The New Testament in Modern English by J. B. Phillips (JP) 1958

5) The Amplified New Testament (AT) 1958

6) New Testament, Contemporary English Version (CE) 1991

There are many Bible translations, and more are being produced all the time, the stated objective of a new translation is to make "God's word" more understandable to modern readers. The covert motive seems to be to make the Bible more palatable. CE is a good example of this. I urge the reader to examine as many Bible translations as convenient. These translations should span several generations. With the aid of a concordance or chain reference, the inquirer can track down all references to sex and related subjects. The reader with an open mind will see that the Bible cannot be an intelligent guide to sexual conduct as what follows demonstrates.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is replete with lurid sexual escapades and cruelties—most of which are apparently condoned by Yahweh. Interspersed in this licentious hodgepodge are ridiculously harsh penalties for various sex-related happenstances and transgressions—some of which elsewhere are winked at by the Jewish deity. The Old Testament, therefore, easily disqualifies itself from being a guide to sexual conduct for any rational person. Currently, only the most rabid fundamentalists base much of their sexual mores on the Old Testament.

The New Testament

The New Testament, predominately, has shaped the sexual attitudes of modern Christians. However, apparently few realize exactly what the New Testament literally says about sexual matters. All Christians should study exhaustively what the Bible *literally* says about any subject and not simply take someone else's word for it.

One of the first observations in Bible study is that some sexual strictures are carried over from the Old Testament. New Testament writers give a terrible, new twist to the admonition against adultery, for example. Notice Mat. 19:16-18. To have eternal life (AT) one must not commit adultery. Adultery is con-